

Navy Department  
Office of the Chief of Naval Operations  
Division of Naval History (OP-29)  
Ships' Histories Section

HISTORY OF USS FREDERICK C. DAVIS (DE-136)

The 1600 ton destroyer escort USS FREDERICK C. DAVIS, was the last combatant ship to be sunk in the Atlantic Ocean during World War II. She was constructed by the Consolidated Steel Company, Orange, Texas, during 1942 and spent her entire career in the Atlantic. The keel of the destroyer escort was laid on 9 November 1942. She was launched on 24 January 1943, with Mrs. Dorothy Robins serving as sponsor.

F.C. DAVIS was named for Ensign Frederick Curtice Davis, USNR. Ensign Davis was born 21 October 1915 in Rock County, Wisconsin. He enlisted in the Navy in 1939 and was designated a naval aviator in 1940. Ensign Davis was killed in action while serving in Observation Squadron ONE, USS NEVADA in the Hawaiian Area on 7 December 1941.

After commissioning on 14 July 1943, the destroyer escort operated on escort duty, anti-submarine, patrol duty and special operations in the Atlantic throughout the remainder of 1943.  
SEE PRECEDING SHEET FOR MATERIAL PRIOR TO THIS:  
WAR DAILY

In December 1943, the ship was one of the two units which composed Task Group 80.2 in USS HERBERT C. JONES. On 1 December 1943, FREDERICK C. DAVIS and HERBERT C. JONES were sailing enroute to Algiers, Algeria. They arrived the following day, and were assigned as escorts for convoys UGS 24 and GUS 23 on 4 December bound for Oran, Algeria. The two ships arrived in Oran on 6 December, and moored in Mers El Kebir Harbor.

While in Oran, FREDERICK C. DAVIS underwent temporary repairs to remedy a leakage in the lower sound room. On 11 December, Lieutenant Commander O. W. Goepner, USNR, was relieved as Commanding Officer by Lieutenant Commander R. C. Robbins, Jr., USNR.

On 12 December, the ship joined convoy GUS 24. An empty lifeboat was sighted off the starboard beam at a distance of 200 yards; ~~the following day~~ (16 Dec) a merchant vessel which had joined the convoy, was struck by a torpedo, and the escorts shifted to concentrate on a counter-attack off the port bow of the convoy.

The ship increased speed and commenced a rapid zig-zag, patrolling from the starboard beam to ahead of the convoy. The escorts commenced dropping depth charges. An enemy submarine was forced to surface as a result of the depth charges, and USS WOOLSEY sank the submarine with gunfire. The torpedoed merchant vessel returned to Oran accompanied by FREDERICK C. DAVIS and HERBERT C. JONES, AER. 17 Dec.

During the latter part of December 1943, the destroyer escort made another voyage to Algiers, returning to Oran on 29 December. DEP. 25 DEC \*

FREDERICK C. DAVIS and HERBERT C. JONES were assigned as escorts for Convoy KMS 36, on 4 January for a voyage to Bizerte, Tunisia. They arrived on the 7th and the voyage was uneventful. The escort was assigned to a special troop convoy on

11  
January whose destination was Naples, Italy. Numerous contacts were made enroute to Naples, however, they were all determined to be false. The convoy arrived in the Bay of Naples on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1944.

GOT UNDERWAY 17 JAN FOR AMPHIB. LANDING OPER. AT SALERNO (17-18 JAN).

SHE DEP. NAPLES 21 JAN  
DE 136 was assigned to take part in the landings at Anzio which had been set for the 22nd. Her duties were to provide anti-submarine and anti-aircraft protection for ships in the fire-support areas. During the remainder of the month FREDERICK C. DAVIS maintained a patrol along the northwestward boundaries of the designated anchorage area off Cape d' Anzio, Italy; WITH HERBERT C. JONES SHE CARRIED SPECIAL EQUIPMENT TO COMBAT ENEMY ROCKET-PROPELLED, RADIO-DIRECTED GUIDED BOMBS.

During the ensuing days, the only serious enemy operations toward ships in the task force came from aircraft and mines. Shelling by enemy shore batteries was very sporadic, causing minor, if any, damage to the task force.

The ship experienced over 100 air raid alerts and 29 actual bombings during this period. Surprise attacks were very few due to the effectiveness of the fighter-director ship and a special U. S. Army team on board. The little escort usually maneuvered as close to Anzio harbor as safe navigation would permit to afford more protection to ships unloading and harbor facilities during the dive bombing attacks.

NUC for Anzio  
Three enemy aircraft, two fighter-bombers and one medium bomber of an unknown type, were shot down by the ship. Tactics at night included horizontal and dive bombing after dropping flares.

Two enemy aircraft were shot down on 24 January. A fighter-bomber group of four aircraft dove out of the sun toward Anzio harbor. FREDERICK C. DAVIS was patrolling at two thirds speed, with battle stations manned. One aircraft banked to left on a course parallel to the ship's course at about 1,000 feet altitude. The plane was taken under fire with all guns when off the starboard quarter at a range of about 2,000 yards. It caught fire when off the beam, crashing on land.

At 1808, during a concentrated attack by horizontal dive bombers, a medium bomber was taken under fire by the ship. This plane had one engine burning, but was maintaining its altitude and speed. Tracers from all guns seemed to be hitting, and the plane finally burst into flames and spun in, crashing about 800 yards inshore from Cape d' Anzio.

At 1050 on the 27th, warning was received to expect a fighter-bomber attack. At 1107, planes were sighted off the stern, diving toward Anzio Harbor. The first group of four aircraft pressed home their attack and were taken under fire by DAVIS and all other vessels in the area. Friendly aircraft entered the melee and firing was checked.

Another group of two FW-190's were spotted at approximately 8,000 feet diving in the wake of the first attack group. The 40 MM gun crew, which had sighted the planes, commenced firing. One plane went into a spin, splashing about 1,500 yards off the stern. No parachute was seen, and the wreckage sank immediately. It is possible that three planes were fighter coverage for the bombers, diving to attack our aircraft, as no bombs exploded when the plane crashed. The second fighter plane pulled out of its dive at about 6,000 feet and headed toward German lines to the North.

Damage to FREDERICK C. DAVIS during the attacks was very slight. At 1421, on 27 January, a group of fighter-bombers making a run over the ship toward harbor installations at Anzio, were taken under heavy fire from the ship. Shortly thereafter, a second group of enemy fighter-bombers were sighted high above, making a horizontal run, their bombs already away.

Thirteen bombs struck in a radius of 100 yards around DAVIS, three within 20 yards on either quarter and the port bow. They were approximately 100 pound fragmentation bombs. Numerous shrapnel holes were found on the port side forward, mostly in the superstructure.

One man on gun No.1 received a shrapnel wound in his right shoulder. On two occasions during night dive-bombing attacks, bombs fell close aboard, but no damage was received. Strafing occurred on one of these occasions, but all missiles appeared to strike the water ahead of the ship.

During the period 1 to 11 February 1944, FREDERICK C. DAVIS maintained anti-aircraft and anti-submarine patrol in Cape d' Anzio area, a distance from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles westward of the anchorage area. Enemy retaliation against shipping continued in the use of fighter-bombers, horizontal and dive bombers, aircraft minelayers and shelling by long-range artillery.

Gunnery doctrine aboard FREDERICK C. DAVIS was to fire on any aircraft seen diving on or known hostile planes during daylight; and only on visible targets attacking the ship by night. Heavy smoke proved to be the best night defense against flare-lighted attacks.

On 12 February, the enemy attempted 2 attacks on the Anzio area during the early morning, but both failed to materialize, with one group dropping bombs to the north of the port. At 0845, twelve German fighters (FW 190's) approached the harbor from the northwest at 12,000 feet. They split into separate flights of 3 or 4 planes each and dove, dropping bombs in the harbor area.

At 1210, DAVIS departed Anzio for Naples, having been relieved by USS HERBERT C. JONES. After one day in Naples, DAVIS sailed <sup>on 14 Feb</sup> to Palermo, Sicily, returning to Naples on the 16th. She sailed the following day for Anzio, and relieved HERBERT C. JONES. The ship immediately commenced anti-aircraft and anti-submarine patrol in the inner anchorage area. Enemy aircraft were overhead continuously until 2400 with all attacks directed against shore installations.

AND  
JAMMING  
SHIP  
DUTIES TOO.

During the first attack at 1320, DAVIS fired briefly at dive-bombers expending nine rounds of 3 inch 50 caliber ammunition, and twelve rounds of 40 millimeter. None of the raids caused any damage to shipping.

On 18 February, the first action came at 0315 when seven hostile aircraft flew over the port at low altitudes in two separate flights, dropping bombs in the harbor without damage to shipping.

This flight was one of the first to commence mining the harbor. One bomb fell close aboard during the attack at 0528. No further attacks developed over

On the 19th, enemy single-engined fighter-bombers were active throughout the day, but all enemy formations were broken up by heavy fighter patrols. Numerous friendly bombers passed overhead throughout the afternoon, bombing enemy lines. One B-25 crashed off Cape d' Anzio, about one mile from the ship and sank before rescue operations could be carried out.

At 0020 on the 20th, enemy aircraft commenced a series of attacks which caused mine alerts to be sounded throughout the day. All bombings took place in the harbor area and forward area. Again, no damage to shipping was recorded. Shelling of the anchorage was heavy during the afternoon, with negative results as far as the enemy was concerned.

Six heavy attacks on shipping were carried out by the enemy on 21 February, commencing at 0013, with a flare-lighted heavy bomber attack. Heavy shore-based anti-aircraft fire prevented the enemy from making good runs during this attack. Two other light raids occurred during the early morning, aimed at forward areas.

The first of a series of post-dawn attacks occurred at 0700, when about eight single-engined fighter bombers attempted a raid on the anchorage area, coming in from the sun in long fast dives. A formation of four passed directly over the ship at about 2,000 feet.

All ships opened fire on the raiders, spoiling their bombing aim with one plane downed about a mile astern of FREDERICK C. DAVIS. No ships were damaged. At 1405 on the same day, a group of eight fighter-bombers roared downed out of the sun, pushing over shipping to bomb the port area. Heavy anti-aircraft put up by ships deterred the bombers from shipping. Heavy bombers again made their appearance at 1805 when a glider-bomber attack swooped in. Twelve to 15 JU 88's and D9 217's were poised overhead for attack during the raid. Heavy smoke and anti-aircraft fire discouraged the Germans, who dropped but three bombs at an extreme range.

All signals were jammed and the bombs exploded harmlessly about two miles short of the shipping. One plane was downed by anti-aircraft fire. The enemy made his last attack at 2135, using flares, but overlooking shipping for shore targets.

Fighter-bombers made a brief appearance at 0647 on 22 February, but were diverted by friendly fighters. At 1330 heavy shelling caused all ships to move seaward. The shelling continued throughout the day and evening, with one near miss off the port quarter. Enemy E-boats attempted an attack at 2200 but were engaged by patrol craft about two miles off Cape d' Anzio with one enemy craft reported sunk.

23 Feb

The following day, one attack by heavy bombers closed in at 0500 with no damage reported. FREDERICK C. DAVIS sailed from Anzio, enroute to Naples with Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, USN; Brigadier General J. R. Hawkins, USAF; Major General John Lucas, USA; and Brigadier General Gordon Saville, USA, aboard for transportation; ALL NAPLES SAME DAY.

From 24 to 28 February, DE 136 remained in Naples where she loaded fuel and provisions. She sailed again on 29 February 1944 for Anzio, Italy. Upon her arrival there, she relieved HERBERT C. JONES and commenced patrol

duties around the anchorage area. Enemy bombers gave the anchorage area a continuous pounding commencing at 1955 and continuing until 2254. During this period, an unknown number of aircraft dropped at least 60 bombs among the ships with no damage.

Low clouds gave perhaps the best protection to the ships. Planes could be heard diving above the clouds, and then bombs would fall. The attacks were not coordinated, but planes bombed whatever they could see through the clouds, with targets illuminated by below-average flares.

The ship was strafed three times without damage. One aircraft was seen under his own flares, and was instantly fired on. Tracers were hitting. The plane banked away into a dark area and was not seen again. It was reported the following morning that a plane had crashed on the beach. Two others were downed during the raid, which was more successful on land targets, with two large fires started. Many bombs landed within 100 yards of the ship during the raid.

FREDERICK C. DAVIS was relieved on 5 March by HERBERT C. JONES and she proceeded to Naples, Italy. After four days, she returned to Anzio <sup>10 PM</sup>. She sailed again on the 11th enroute to Oran, Algiers <sup>ARR. 14 MAR</sup>. Her next voyage took her <sup>DEP. 24 MAR</sup> to Palermo, Sicily, where she arrived on (27 March). <sup>OUT AGAIN FOR</sup> The destroyer escort then returned to Anzio on 30 March and resumed anti-submarine and anti-aircraft patrol.

Several bombing attacks closed in early in April, however, no direct hits were made. Several bombs exploded causing shrapnel holes in the starboard side of the "fighting Freddy".

The largest number of enemy aircraft to attempt an attack on shipping during daylight hours occurred on 12 April. The attack was a total loss as far as the enemy was concerned, for the full power of all Army and Navy anti-aircraft literally covered the sky with an umbrella of shrapnel bursts. Nine planes were definitely downed by the combined anti-aircraft fire, with two probables and countless damaged.

Very few bombs were dropped which caused little or no damage. Friendly fighters picked up the bombers as they were leaving the area, and downed another eight.

AS JAMMING + TRAFFIC CONTROL SHIP

USS HILARY P. JONES relieved FREDERICK C. DAVIS on 15 April and the destroyer escort sailed for Naples, for fuel and rest. She returned to Anzio <sup>(20 APR.)</sup> several days later. On 27 April, Lieutenant Commander R. C. Robbins, Jr., USNR commanding officer of FREDERICK C. DAVIS was presented with the Legion of Merit.

UNTIL

CONT. TO SERVE AT ANZIO AND ALSO

During May and June 1944, the ship escorted LST convoys from Naples to Anzio. From 4 to 10 June, she remained anchored during the daylight hours, and got underway for patrol around the anchorage area during the hours of darkness. While on patrol, small depth charges were dropped in defense against submarine attacks.

Numerous alerts were sounded with one major attack occurring against shipping at 0005 on 10 June. For one-half hour, 15 JU-88's attacked shipping in the anchorage with armor piercing and anti-personnel bombs. More than 60 bombs were dropped with many near misses around DAVIS and other ships.

Float flares were used for the first time by the Germans in the 90 attacks experienced by DAVIS at Anzio. These flares were very bright and expertly placed. They served, however, to illuminate the enemy planes for the ship's anti-aircraft fire. USS SYMBOL received some material damage and about 25 personnel casualties. No other damage was reported.

DAVIS arrived at Palermo, Sicily on 13 June and went alongside USS DELTA for a brief availability period to repair faulty auxiliary boilers and her 40 millimeter director system; DEP. 16 JUN FOR NAPLES, ARR. 17 JUN FOR CONVOY DUTY IN ITALIAN AREA. DEP. 24 JUN FOR ORAN.

From 27 to 30 June 1944, F.C. DAVIS was in Mers El Kebir Harbor, Oran, Algeria, undergoing tender availability alongside USS VULCAN. She sailed on 6 July enroute to Bizerte, Tunisia, ARR. 7 JUL.

F.C. DAVIS had several escort jobs between Oran, Algeria; Arzew, Algeri  
Palermo, Sicily, and Naples, Italy during the latter part of July, and early August 1944. On 9 August, the destroyer escort got underway for Ajaccio, Corsica, arriving on the 12th, with LST ASSAULT CONVOY FOR OPERATION DRAGON.

ON 13 AUG.  
The ship sailed ~~immediately after arriving~~ for the assault area in Cavalaire Bay, France. She arrived in the Gulf of St. Tropez, France on 15 August and anchored astern of CATOCTIN. Numerous red alerts were sounded throughout the day with one very brief attack by an unknown number of planes occurring at 2058. The ship's guns did not open fire. One LST was hit during the attack. TO ACT AS JAMMING GUARD VESSEL FOR THAT SHIP

The entire period from 16 to 31 August 1944 was spent off the Southern France beachhead. Red alerts continued at frequent intervals throughout the day of the 16th, but the enemy made only one appearance.

The aircraft sighted during this attack were approaching from the Saint Raphael Area at about 4,000 feet. F. C. DAVIS fired briefly on the aircraft expending 25 rounds of ammunition. The area was cleared of enemy aircraft at approximately 2105.

On 17 August, FREDERICK C. DAVIS was detached from CATOCTIN and assigned to Task Force 85 as jamming and anti-aircraft guard ship in St. Tropez Gulf. The ship remained at anchor near the town of St. Tropez until 23 August THEN MOVED TO UNLOADING BEACHES IN BAIE DE LA CAVALAIRE FOR SAME DUTY.

The next day, a single enemy aircraft flew over St. Tropez anchorage, releasing anti-personnel bombs which caused casualties aboard CATOCTIN and in the town of St. Tropez. F. C. DAVIS commenced firing, and expended a total of 248 rounds of ammunition.

From 10 through 19 September, the destroyer-escort acted as a unit of 1 outer anti-submarine and traffic-control screen which was established to protect the beaches and the route between Dragoon area and Toulon-Marseille. No enemy contacts were made during this period.

On 19 September 1944, F. C. DAVIS was ordered to return to Oran in preparation for an ultimate return to the United States. The destroyer escort entered the New York Navy Yard on 24 October 1944, and underwent a 30-day overhaul.

WAS REVIEWED OF PATROL AND SAILED  
VIA NAMES (20-22 SEP) AND

(24 SEP - OCT)  
WAS  
DIARY  
ENDS  
30  
SEP.  
44.

She returned to the Atlantic in early 1945, with Lieutenant James R. Crosby, USNR, in command, to resume anti-submarine training and operations. During December and January, the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet received information which suggested that German submarines might attempt to attack cities along the Atlantic coast with robot bombs, possibly launching the missiles from the U-boat's decks. Effective steps were taken by the erection of a broad killer group barrier across the expected course of German submarine moving toward the North American coast. This killer group barrier was established in the mid-Atlantic on 9 April, under the tactical command of Captain J. R. Ruhsenberger, USN, in the escort carrier MISSION BAY. Escorts of this force, which was composed of Task Groups 22.11, 22.13, 22.14, and 22.5, had remarkable success against the approaching U-boat group, destroying two during the early morning of 16 April, and finishing off a third on 22 April 1945.

EXTRACTED FROM MESSAGE WITH LOSS REPORT

DE SCOUTING LINE

FREDERICK C. DAVIS operated in the 14-ship surface barrier force. On the morning of 22 April, a TBM from the carrier BOGUE sighted a U-boat in the act of surfacing. The submarine immediately submerged as the TBM made a hurried depth-charge attack. A flight of TBMs were launched and all ships in the barrier were ordered to the area of contact. Several contacts were made during the night, but subsequently classified as non-sub.

On the morning of 24 April 1945, the German submarine U-546 was caught by F. C. DAVIS in the act of sneaking through the surface barrier which was then about 650 miles northwest of the Azores. At 0829, the sonar striker reported a sharp, clear sound contact, at a distance of 2000 yards. The target was lost almost immediately as it dropped rapidly aft on the starboard side between FREDERICK C. DAVIS and HAYTER and was lost in the wake.

Lieutenant (junior grade) J. F. McWhorter, USNR, who was officer of the deck, rapidly ordered "right standard rudder" to investigate this possible contact astern. At 0835, the sound contact was regained by the sonarman, and was plotted until 0839, the last report giving the target a range of only 650 yards.

AT 0940 TORPEDO HIT  
POS. 43-51 N., 40-15 W.

Suddenly, in a single, disastrous moment, the world blanked out permanently for the men in the bridge area of F. C. DAVIS, as the impact of a tremendous torpedo explosion hurled scores of intent figures to the unyielding overhead. F. C. DAVIS had been struck on the port side in her forward engine spaces by an acoustic torpedo fired at point-blank range.

Catastrophe aboard F. C. DAVIS was compounded in the first moments following the explosion, by the fact that no general alarm had previously been sounded since the sound contact had not yet been identified as a sub. As a result, many of the men in the after part of the ship, which suffered less extensive damage, first learned of the disaster as they were thrown from their bunks by the explosion. A handful of men, managed to get out of the lower bridge area.